



Writing Poetry

Personal Poetry

Narrator

You will now hear Jackie Kay, Paul Muldoon and Jean 'Binta' Breeze talk about the use of autobiography as well as other people's voices as subject matter for poetry.

Jackie Kay

I often use my own life in my poetry, in the way that artists might paint pictures of themselves. It doesn't necessarily mean that you are actually writing about yourself in an obvious way, in the way that an artist isn't necessarily painting themselves when they paint. You can actually change your history, change your past, change your memories and alter it, but I like to use it a bit like a springboard to dive into the pool of my imagination; I use my own life like that.

Paul Muldoon

Oh, I think the fact that I'm from Northern Ireland has been a huge element in these poems. Of course, because never mind whether or not one might be writing poems simply to – as a citizen there – try to make sense of what's going on, is a responsibility and I think it's a situation in which we've all tried to make sense of things in so far as we're able. So that is a feature of many of these poems. But mind you, that's a feature of life in every part of the world. I mean there's too often, I think, a feeling that, you know, if one lives in England somehow everything is settled and there's no discussion; everything is cut and dried; everything has a sheen. Or if one lives in the US, everything's kind of over in some ways. Well these ideas are blatantly false.

Jean 'Binta' Breeze

I think there is a private voice. I write many poems that I have published in my books which I never do on stage. The only time I do them is if I find myself in a very intimate setting with, you know, a few people and you can kind of talk and sit in a chair and say, 'Hey, I was thinking about my daughter when I wrote this one.' But there is a stage at which you need to kind of harness other voices beyond yourself.

Jackie Kay

Well, ever since I was a wee girl, I used to go to Burns' suppers where there'd be all these really quite exciting addresses to the haggis. And it would be ... Poetry to me was initially something very dramatic, you know. The haggis would be stabbed with a knife, and the whole idea of having a poem to a haggis anyway is hilarious when you think about it for any length of time. And so I like that – the drama in poetry from going to Burns' suppers, and I like the idea that you could find that, that poems could be voices really, real voices that could just come out at you from the dark. So I like to try in my own poems and create some sense of drama; that's very important. And I am, I suppose, a frustrated actress, I used to always want to be an actress so, and the next best thing to acting is writing the parts, creating the voices.